

The Welcome

Chap. II

in front of my tent, everything is ready to give me welcome. Salim⁰⁰⁰₈₃₄ stands alone in front of the tent, and answers my *saldm 'alaikum*, 576 for it would not do for his womenfolk to appear in the presence of my hired driver and the shaikh's *fiddwi*, Sa'ud. They can, however, be seen discreetly peeping from their tent.

My goods and chattels are next unpacked, and I proceed to get⁰⁰⁰ things shipshape. Whilst Jawad is putting together my camp bed, and opening up my bedding, coffee is brought and served.

As soon as the coast is clear, and the menfolk are safely ensconced⁵⁷⁶ in their tent, in creeps the gentle-eyed and sweet-voiced Amaha to⁵²¹ bid me welcome in the reception portion of my black goat-hair tent. She walks in gracefully, and in her low contralto voice bids me, "Al grwa ya Abu Sa'ud" (Strength to you, O father of Sa'ud), the usual salutation among the womenfolk. "Allah i gauchi ya Um Husa" (God give you strength, O mother of Husa) I reply, and then follows a host of welcoming sentences, such as, "How are you? How is Um Sa'ud? What news of the Khatuna (the wife)? and Sa'ud and Zahra (my children) how are they? Well, well, I hope. What is doing in Kuwait, and what news of rain?" etc. Amaha is followed by Maneira, the Mutairiyah, helper in the house, and Husa, Amaha's daughter of fifteen (recently veiled to show she is now a woman and^[582] of marriageable age). Then the daughters of Dhurwahi the herdsman, and of Maziad, the Dhafiri, and last of all comes coal-black little Maharak, the negro slave's little boy—Barruk they call him in terms of endearment. The other little curly-headed boy, Marruk or Mzairik, his brother, is still with the lambs a quarter of a mile away, and so is Hamud, Maneira's small son.

The women, led by Amaha, sit round me in a circle, all asking after me and all wanting to know something. Little Husa, whom I have known since she was seven years old, encouraged by her mother, comes and sits by my side after holding up her *fajrs* a moment for me to kiss her dimpled mouth. She has mother's permission to do this, even though she is now fifteen and a grown woman, for have I not known her since she was a little child? After this preliminary, she retires again and sits by her mother's side, keeping that silence which all well-behaved Badawin children maintain when their elders are present. Only shy little Barruk comes up⁰⁰⁰

Exchange of News

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in small well-bred face to my mouth for a kiss—really for a date, 281 which I had not got.

Next the new watch-dog, a fierce and shaggy brute, is produced and shown to me. I praise it in suitable terms to express the hope that he will keep off wolves. The women now go, whilst I wash and get into my warm Gilgit boots and prepare for the evening meal.

It is night. I have just had the most delightful dinner I have ever 282 tasted. Only Amaha's skilled hand could have prepared it. A dish of rice stewed with raisins and onion shreds, and on top a perfectly formed baby lamb which has not yet eaten grass. How good it was, and how soft and luscious! My two *gharas* (dividing curtains) have 000 been furled inwards and tied to the centre rope so as to form a cosy room.

A lantern is burning at the far end. The remains of my dinner are sken away. Salim has just brought coffee again. I ask Salim if the needs of my two men have been attended to, and he replies that they have had a dinner similar to mine, and are preparing to turn in. "Have they had coffee?" I ask. "Yes, Abu Sa'ud, they have had coffee. May 521 ● the women come and talk to you before you go to sleep?" he asks. I agree, for it is only 8 p.m. and far too early to think of turning in. Amaha and her friends again creep in and sit down. This time Salim is with them, but not Husna. She is staying with the little black children and putting them to sleep in her tent.

Presently they ask me for the news of Kuwait, and they in turn give me all the Badwin gossip that has come their way since they arrived. They go through the names of everyone camped within 10 miles of them, and Salim tells of raids and counter-raids in distant Najd, the doings of So-and-So, the plans of the King (Bin Sa'ud), and of how careful he must be not to get into trouble with Yaman.* "Believe me, Ya Abu Sa'ud, the Imam Yahya, is very strong and has wonderful arms and infernal machines at his disposal. Why, he even has metal walking-chickens which he sends by the thousand into his enemy's camp by night, and as soon as they get among the troops they explode and kill very many with each explosion. *Ifallah* (by God) it is true! Have I not myself seen men killed in this way? Have I not just returned from Riyadh and seen lots of exploded chickens

* This same took place just before Bin Sa'ud's Yaman adventure of 1926.

Rumours

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- 521 that have been brought back from the Asir front for the King to see? It is true, I say, O Abu Sa'ud. You know I have never told a lie yet, and why should I do so now?"

As he tells this whopper, the women giggle and cry out in pretended alarm. They, of course, believe the story, and half Arabia believes it too.

"Do you know", said Salim again, "that there is talk in the Summan that Faisal al Duwish is alive and in hiding?" I replied caustically that this could not be, seeing that he died in prison of an aneurism two years ago. "That is just it", replied Salim, "you go and swallow any fairy tale that Bin Sa'ud likes to put about. Actually, if you must know it, Al Duwish escaped and is in hiding. Why, as I was coming from Riyadh only twenty days ago I met a Muzairi woman who had met him. She saw him standing outside her tent in the evening. He had come from his hiding place in one of the *dahals* to ask for a little bread. She is a person who knows the Shaikh like her own self. If you must know it was Wadhwa, Faisal's own sister. There, that is proof, isn't it?" Cries of pleasure come from the women, for all the world loved Faisal al Duwish, in the eyes of the Muzair the greatest Badawin leader and shaikh that was ever born of woman.

Such and many similar stories were recounted till, tiring, I told them all to go to bed as I had a long day before me in the morning.

- 264 "Will you want lunch for the road in the morning, Abu Sa'ud?"
574 said the practical-minded Amha. "Yes, of course", said I. So she promised to get up at 4 a.m. and cook me three chickens* and a bowl of rice. The bowl, she said, had a cover, and with a loaf of Arab bread on top and the cover put on, the lunch would keep warm easily till noon. She was as good as her word. Next day's lunch was delicious. A salam now all round and I dismissed my woman friends, and the worthy Salim, and turned in.

- 281 I seemed to have slept but a little while by the entrance of my open tent, when I was awakened by ferocious barking. The three or four camp dogs had taken fright at something. I felt they were moving round and round the tents, they were quiet for five minutes or so and then broke out again in the fiercest growling and barking. I was very

* I had brought these along with me alive from Kuwait.

The Badawin's Code

Chap. III

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A man's first duty is towards God.

His second, the protection of his tent neighbour (*qatr*).

His third, attention to the laws of Hospitality (*shikfa*).

His fourth, his duty towards a traveller under his conduct (*rafq*).

His fifth, attention to the laws of Personal Protection and Sanctuary (*waj*
and *shikfa*).

His sixth and last is to himself: to raid when he can and keep what he has
captured (*shakf*).

It is noteworthy that in fulfilling this last duty he thinks of it as a
sort of reward for what has gone before. Raiding is no sin, but a virtue, [721]
and to kill your enemy a still greater virtue. Therefore, to steal your
enemy's cattle is not robbery but an exploit to be proud of. Your
enemy will do the same to you to-morrow if he gets the chance. (See
Chapter VII.)

THE BADAWIN WOMAN (*Badawiyat*)

Taking the good with the bad, the Badawin woman is nearly all [57]
charm, the natural charm of an unspoiled daughter of Eve, who
knows nothing of the world, and little of town life except from
hearsay.

She has very much of the child about her; all the delightfulness and
all the unreasonableness of a child.

She is prone to sudden storms of rage, and will talk without apparent
reason. She is full of jealousy, and will love and hate with passion
and ferocity, yet she can be the gentlest of beings and is capable of
great sacrifice. She adores her children, though she has no idea of [55]
teaching them discipline or self-control; she will fly at her husband,
if he attempts to punish their child, and will go off the deep end if
her husband does not sleep close by her side (*na yargul wjha*) every
night.

Badawin unmarried girls are, of course, sheltered from any male [52]
society or male friendships outside the circle of their own immediate [74]
families, but married women have far more freedom than their
town sisters, and can be on delightfully friendly terms with males
of their own tribe or kinship. They have strong ideas of propriety,
and are sensitive to a degree about their reputation. The most [52]
dreadful thing in the world that can happen to them is to be talked [58]

Woman's Way

Chap. III

- 621 about. Yet gossips they are, and expert in tearing others' reputations.
628 Many a desert tragedy has resulted from too glib a tongue. Ordinary
sexual matters are discussed before small children with a frankness
164 and simplicity which modern educationists might approve, but which
an English person may find at times embarrassing. The bearing of
their young by camels, mares and ewes is not only an everyday topic,
but mothers will take their children to watch the progress of such
events, alongside their menfolk.
- 177 On the whole, Badawin women are extremely moral, though they
might readily succumb to temptation were it to come their way.
Fortunately it does not.

They go in for love affairs, of course, and married women are not
above falling desperately in love with other men than their husbands.
A woman's only hope in such a case (unless her man happens to be
her first cousin) is to tell her husband the whole truth, and beg him to
divorce her. This happens fairly often among the rank and file, though
not among the senior ladies of the tribe or the shaikh's wives. Sir
Richard Burton has said somewhere that among Badawin women
who were separated from their menfolk during long absences in the
desert when at war, abnormal and unnatural living was not uncommon.
This I think a libel, or at least a grave exaggeration.

THE DAILY ROUND OF A BADAWIN FAMILY—"AN AUTUMN STUDY"

- 182 Time, Early November; Place, Wafra, 30 miles from the sea in the
Kuwait Neutral Zone.

342 The tent is pitched on a slight rise in the ground, so that if rain
352 comes the water will not flood the interior. Everyone is busy from
earliest dawn to nightfall, especially the women and girls. A little rain
has fallen, the first for eight months, and grass has just started sprout-
ing in the hollows. Both camels and sheep are thin and scarcely able
to walk any distance. The summer has been a terribly severe one.
More rain is urgently needed, else the grass that has come up will
wither again. The head of the family has ridden off on his mare the
previous evening to see if better grazing exists 10 miles away. He will
not be back till sunset to-day.

000 At 4 a.m. one of the men-servants gives the 'adhan (call to prayer),

THE BADU OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

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further than this, for none of them wishes to get a reputation for being a quarrelsome or trying companion, and so, when there is anything to do, they all jump up and offer to do it, whether it is to look for a camel, gather wood, or make coffee. Their life is ruled by conventions, and public opinion sees to it that these conventions are observed. In the desert there is no privacy. Every action is seen, and you might say every word is overheard, for they always live crowded together for safety; in any case, they are the most observant people in the world, and everything that happens, however trivial, is noted and later repeated and discussed, so that something which a man has said or done on the coast of the Persian Gulf will be spoken of months later, hundreds of miles away on the borders of the Yaman.

Another difference between Badu and villagers is the way they treat their animals. No Badui would ever knock his camel about; it is far too precious, and in any case he is much too deeply attached to it. You will often see him fondling and kissing his camel, and he will generally be hunting round for tibets for it. Badui, indeed, will always sacrifice their own comfort to that of their animals. Some years ago, when we arrived in the Hadhramaut out of the desert, I remember the enormous meals which were provided for us, such as my always hungry companions cannot even have dreamed of; yet next day they were frantic to get back to the desert where there would be proper grazing for their animals. Sometimes, looking at a wonderful view, I have said to a Badui, "Isn't that lovely?" and he has looked round for a bit and answered, "No, it is rotten bad grazing," and he saw nothing else, whereas if he had been a Persian he would have rhapsodized over it.

Yet they are passionately fond of poetry. They are a noisy, talkative race. I think many of them would find it as hard to stop talking as a heavy smoker to stop smoking, but they will sit for hours in silence if someone is reciting poetry. They are also deeply religious, and in their hard lives they derive at all times a profound comfort from their faith. Townsman often scoff at them and say that they are little better than pagans because they do not observe all the ritual of Islam and are sometimes lax over their prayers and fasting, but you cannot be with them without realizing what an integral part of their everyday lives their religion is. A Rashidi once described to me how alone he had crossed the trackless wastes of the Eastern sands for 450 waterless miles. Asked that anyone should have ventured on such a journey unaccompanied, I asked him, "Do you really mean that you were by yourself?" and he answered me quite simply, "God was my companion."

The Badu are the product of their environment, and it is the constant struggle for survival which has fashioned them as they are. Security is unknown to them and their rewards are at all times pitifully small. At any moment drought, disease, or raiders may sweep their herds away. Yet, tempered from childhood by wind and sun, they face life unflinchingly. In this harsh and barren land the desert had masters only with the desert maid, for who else would share the Badu's couch among the wind-blown sand? For centuries they have guarded the purity of their blood with the dagger, and they are fine-drawn, highly strung, and unstable as thoroughbreds.

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629 treachery. This is probably a slander, inspired by the constant enmity which characterizes their relations with their neighbours; but they certainly deserve their reputation for godlessness, for they never fast nor pray, declaring that the Prophet gave their forefathers exemption from both.

231 We now sat looking down on the busy scene around the well, and those Arabs who had finished watering strolled over and joined us. They asked us what we thought of their herds, and were soon deep in technicalities with my companions. They spoke of individual camels owned by Arabs four or five hundred miles away, of the different breeds, their milk yields and powers of endurance, of prices in Dhofar, Najran and on the Trucial Coast, of pasturage, and of camels taken in raids on other tribes. We heard details of the recent raid upon the Yam and of how Mahdhan, nicknamed the Cat, had remained behind to hold up the pursuit and had been killed when his rifle jammed. He had been the greatest raider in the southern desert and his exploits and daring were legendary among the tribes. I had known him well, for he had guided us the year before from Salala to Dhofar. They spoke of raids across the waterless eastern steppes, and among the giant dunes to the north. They told of pursuits and battles in the dark, of ruthless killings, of blood-feuds and murder. They mentioned famous guides, and waterholes and routes across the sands, where the crye herds still roamed. Meanwhile, a young lad had blown up the embers of the fire and set the long-necked coffee pot to boil. His uncovered hair fell to his naked shoulders and framed an impish laughing face. Our elderly host had roasted the coffee beans and passed them round for us to sniff, before pounding them up in a wooden mortar and putting them in the pot. He flavoured his coffee with crushed ginger as is the custom in the Hadramaut. He also gave us parched grain and beans to eat; all that he had with him, for on such simple fare do the Bedu travel.

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We lingered with them till the sun was nearly set and then descended past the well, deserted now, except for a bent old woman and two small children, who were loading the last of their water-skins on a young and restive camel. Tomorrow there would be the endless bargaining for camels and arguments with prospective guides, and ahead of us lay all the hardships and difficulties of the desert crossing. But my companions were content, and being happy in the present broke into song as they approached the camp-fire through the dark.